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SPIRITUAL MASSAGE THERAPY.

May 29, 2010 | By Ryan Hurd

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Conventional massage therapy involves kneading the soft muscular tissues to relieve pain and soreness. Spiritual massage therapy, on the other hand, is a holistic practice that treats the mind and spirit as well as the body. This holistic approach to massage therapy includes many different varieties that independent massage therapists may incorporate into private practice as they see fit.

ANCIENT SOURCES

Because humans always have had sore muscles, massage has a long history. Ancient depictions of the benefit of massage have been found in ancient Greek, Egyptian, Chinese and Indian sources. Hippocrates, the "father of medicine," wrote in the fourth century B.C., "Anyone wishing to study medicine must master the art of massage." In many of these early settings, massage was done in religious healing settings.

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PHILOSOPHY OF ENERGY HEALING

In many parts of the world, massage always has had a spiritual component, as health is seen as a life force that equally affects body, mind and spirit. This holistic approach is endorsed today in many forms of spiritual massage therapy, including Japanese acupressure and Thai massage. In the East, health is governed by a balance of spiritual energy, or a life force, called "Qi." Massage helps direct this flow of Qi, restores balance and eliminates many symptoms of pain and discomfort along the way. Equally important is the practitioner's ability to have a spiritual, or "inward focus," something that is also valued in the practice of traditional Ayurvedic Indian head massage, as well as other energy healing

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modalities that do not involve direct touch, such as Reiki. Similarly, in the Christian tradition, the notion of "laying on hands" is considered a spiritual practice as it combines therapeutic touch with prayer and mindfulness.

BENEFITS

The central physical benefits of massage are well supported. These include the reduction of muscle soreness and stiffness, relief from muscle spasms, and the promotion of greater flexibility and movement. Spiritual, or mind-body, benefits include relaxation, the ease of inner tension, the improvement of mood and the promotion of a greater body awareness.

VARIETIES OF SPIRITUAL MASSAGE

Some popular forms of spiritual massage today include acupressure, Thai massage, Ayurvedic massage and Christian massage therapy. As massage therapists integrate various techniques from these traditions into their own private practices, dozens of unique massage styles have resulted with spiritual or holistic elements. If overwhelmed by these choices, always choose a board-certified massage therapist.

MEDICAL RESEARCH

The medical field is not united on the question of whether massage has healing properties. Many physicians deny that massage can help the body heal more quickly, an oft-cited benefit of massage. However, the mind-body connection has been supported, as many studies have shown that even one session of massage can reduce anxiety, depression and chronic pain, according to the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine.

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